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A LONG-TERM CONSERVATION PROGRAM FOR THE GREAT PLAINS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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This statement is issued primarily to inform representatives of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the Land Grant Colleges, and others concerned with the Great Plains Conservation Program of the steps currently under way in the Department to implement Public Law 1021, which provides for long-range conservation activity in the Great Plains States. Additional reports will be issued as the program develops.

A new, long-term conservation program for the Great Plains was authorized by Public Law 1021, enacted August 7, 1956. It will further help farmers and ranchers plan and install, on a voluntary basis, the soil and water conservation measures and make the land use adjustments needed to achieve a more stable agriculture.

The program scheduled to go into operation in July 1957, or as soon as the Congress appropriates funds as authorized by the law, is now being developed. Its effectiveness will depend on the degree of participation by farmers and ranchers. This in turn calls for a high degree of cooperation and teamwork between the several Federal and State agencies who will have a part in it.

What Does PL 1021 Provide?

As a further means of helping Great Plains farmers and ranchers make needed changes in land use and establish cropping systems with necessary conservation measures, Public Law 1021 authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into long-term contracts for those purposes. Farmers and ranchers who wish to participate present plans acceptable to the Secretary for needed conservation measures and land use changes. The Department of Agriculture will then offer them long-term cost-sharing contracts. In these contracts the Secretary of Agriculture will make advance commitments to share with the farmers or ranchers the cost of establishing the combination of conservation practices provided for in their plans. Soil and water conservation technicians of the Department will help farmers and ranchers make the plans. The contracts are not to be for longer than ten years, ending not later than December 31, 1971.

Who Is Eligible?

The Secretary of Agriculture may designate counties in Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming as special problem areas within which this program may operate. Farmers and ranchers within designated counties, who have control of their land for the contract period, will be eligible to participate under terms of the program now being developed.

Who Operates the Program?

No new agencies have been set up to carry out this program. Instead, existing agencies of the Department of Agriculture will help the local people carry it out. They will take into consideration all programs of State and local agencies, including soil conservation, wind erosion control and grazing districts. The Secretary has directed the Soil Conservation Service to take administrative leadership for the program. The program is being developed by an inter-agency group of representatives from ten USDA agencies. The Great Plains Council will continue to advise and assist in encouraging adoption of the program.

What Do Contracts Provide?

The law provides that a producer who enters into a contract under the Great Plains Conservation Program will agree to carry out his conservation and land use plan for his farm or ranch substantially in accordance with the schedule of operations in the plan.

In return for this agreement, the Secretary of Agriculture contracts to share the cost of carrying out the planned conservation practices for which cost-sharing is appropriate and in the public interest.

The farmer or rancher can get help in determining the capabilities of his land and in planning the kind of farming operation that will help him cope with the variable and unstable climatic problems of the Great Plains. He also can receive technical help from the Department in installing his planned conservation measures and in making land use changes.

The law provides for transfer of interest in the contract in the event the producer sells or otherwise loses control of the farm or ranch during the contract period. Provisions also are made in the law for handling contract violations.

The law provides assurance that acreage allotments and marketing quotas will not be decreased during the period of the contract because of changes of land use required by the contract.

Long Range Emphasis Differs From Other Programs

Cost-sharing help provided under PL 1021 is for a period of years instead of one year at a time. It provides cost sharing for a combination of conservation practices a farmer or rancher wants to undertake over a period of years and which represents the complete farm or ranch conservation needs. It is not designed as an income supplement measure. Conservation plans developed under the program will in the planning process make needed provision for land in the Acreage Reserve or Conservation Reserve of the Soil Bank Program. However, land in this program may be grazed or otherwise used, consistent with good management, as compared with non-use of Soil Bank acreage. The long-term conservation practices

and land use adjustments will be those known to be specially adapted and needed to further the total Great Plains Program.

Does "1021" Replace Other Programs?

Public Law 1021 specifically provides that this program is in addition to and not in substitution of any other program. Maximum use will be encouraged and made of other programs that contribute to the objectives of the Great Plains Conservation Program.

Important Part of Total Great Plains Program

The conservation program carried out under Public Law 1021 will be in support of the objectives of the total Great Plains Program as outlined in the President's message of January 11, 1956. The total program, however, includes more than soil and water conservation measures. It takes in all the agricultural and economic adjustments needed to protect, stabilize, and improve the productive capacity of this vast region. Provisions of PL 1021 are primary tools, however, by which these total objectives may be reached.

What Agencies Are Participating?

The Inter-Agency group, with the Soil Conservation Service representative as chairman, is now preparing the necessary policy statements, regulations, and procedures for the Secretary's consideration and use in carrying out the program. Other members of the committee are the Agricultural Conservation Program Service, the Federal Extension Service, Forest Service, Commodity Stabilization Service, Agricultural Research Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, Farmers Home Administration, and the Office of Information. In States and counties, appropriate representatives of Land Grant Colleges, experiment stations, and other State and local government agencies will be invited to work with similar inter-agency groups to help plan and adapt the program to local needs.

"The goal to be achieved is a more stable agriculture, more dependable sources of income, and progressively satisfactory livelihood for the people of the region. To achieve this goal, there must be widespread use of good soil management and water conservation practices and adjustments in sizes and types of farms which will enable farmers and ranchers to effectively cope with the climatic hazards of the region." -- From "Program for the Great Plains," transmitted by President Eisenhower to the Congress of the United States, January 11, 1956.